

*D. W. Ashurst
for the Author*

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THE
O R A T I O N

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

Medical Society of London,

PRESIDENT,

HENRY CLUTTERBUCK, Esq., M.D.,

AT THEIR

SIXTY-NINTH ANNIVERSARY,

MARCH 8, 1842.



BY

HENRY HANCOCK,

SURGEON TO THE CHARING CROSS HOSPITAL; LECTURER ON SURGERY AT THE CHARING CROSS HOSPITAL MEDICAL SCHOOL; LATE SURGEON TO THE ROYAL INFIRMARY FOR CHILDREN, WATERLOO ROAD; FELLOW OF THE MEDICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON; FELLOW OF THE MEDICO CHIRURGICAL, THE HARVEIAN, AND WESTMINSTER SOCIETIES, &c. &c. &c.

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1842.



ORATION, &c.

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,

It is usual on occasions like the present to take a review of what has occurred of interest to the Profession during the preceding twelve months, but, unfortunately, Sir, the period which has elapsed since the last Anniversary has been unusually barren of novelty. The operations for Squinting and Stuttering are familiar to all, whilst Animal Magnetism although practised by a few, is almost a byegone term. Reform is still talked about, and the Senate has promised some legislative enactment, but of what nature, is at present mere matter of conjecture ; whether it will possess any specific power of enriching the members of our body at a railroad pace, remains to be proved ; we have at all events the great consolation of knowing, that the Medical practitioner can scarcely be worse paid than he is at present.

Again, Sir, we are informed by the letter of the President of the Royal College of Surgeons, which appeared in the Lancet of the 11th ultimo, that provision is being made for adequately re-

munerating professional attendants on the Poor Law Unions, and for doing away with the derogatory system of tenders ; this alteration must be hailed with satisfaction by all, for nothing can be worse ; nothing more injurious to the character and dignity of the Profession, than the fact of Gentlemen, men of talent and learning, entering into competitions of this nature, under-bidding each other, until in some instances their emolument might almost be summed up in the figure 0. I may be told “ it is very true that the emolument is small, but the appointment leads to something.” It does indeed lead to something—to the degradation of the Profession, and therefore ought never to have been practised. I trust, however, from the letter in question, that this grievance will soon be removed, and that the Members of the Medical Profession will henceforth be treated with that liberality and consideration, which as men of talent, and Gentlemen, they have every right to demand ; particularly, as there is no class of men from whom so much gratuitous assistance is expected, nor by whom, I will fearlessly assert, that assistance is more liberally and cheerfully rendered.

Sir, I cannot compliment the Council of the Medical Society of London on the selection they have made in the person of their Orator, but not being a member of that body I had no voice in the matter. Believe me, Sir, nothing could have been

more contrary to my wishes or inclinations than to have appeared before you on this occasion, for when I look around me and observe the numerous members present, who would have done honor to their selection, when I call to mind the talent and eloquence those gentlemen display upon all occasions, when I remember the various orations which have been delivered on former Anniversaries, I fear that in the comparison my present attempt will sink into “*Vox et præterea nihil.*”

It has been repeatedly observed that Societies instituted for the free communication of ideas, may be ranked among the most useful means of promoting knowledge ; and this remark peculiarly applies to Medical Societies, where the discussions tend to the developement of practical science ; it is there the younger members of the profession are welcomed by their seniors, and encouraged in the paths of diligence and research ; it is there that they are enabled to school their desultory, their untried theories, testing them by the scale of learning and experience ; it is there they practically learn that by merit and merit alone can they ever hope to attain distinguished positions in the estimation of their professional brethren ; it is there that the studious member is incited to persevere in the exercise of his talents by the example of his associates, and the invigorating spirit of generous emulation, which imperceptibly leads him on to future fame.

The Medical Society of London, instituted in 1773, is the parent of the several other Societies, established in the Metropolis, having for their object the promotion of Medical science, and the utility of the Institution may be best appreciated by the avidity with which the example has been followed in various parts of the kingdom ; and though we must plead guilty to the charge made against us by one of the leading Medical Journals, of occasionally indulging too much in the dreamy delight of seductive theory ; still the high character of the Society has been fully supported by the celebrated and talented individuals whose names have from time to time been numbered among its members, and who in many instances have been able to refer their celebrity to their connexion with it.

The returns made in the third annual report of the Registrar General, containing the number of deaths which occurred down to the middle of the year 1840, show that in the Metropolis they have decreased from the year 1837 to that period. In 1837—38 the number was 53,597. In 1838—39, 46,768. In 1839—40, 45,132. Whilst the general mortality of England and Wales has increased from 335,956 to 350,101. The returns also point out that of this number 90,000 died of disease of the respiratory organs, including 60,000 from consumption—66,000 of the epidemic and

contagious diseases, of which one-fourth or 16,000 died from typhus, 10,000 from small pox, 10,000 from scarlatina, 11,000 from measles, 60,000 from scrofulous diseases, and 45,000 from diseases of the nervous system. Whilst in the Metropolis alone during the year 1840, 14,000 died of diseases of the respiratory organs, including 7,246 of consumption, 8,000 from affections of the brain, and between 8 and 9,000 of epidemic and contagious diseases, besides 3,000 from affections of the digestive organs. In 1841, the mortality from these diseases was nearly the same.

These returns likewise shew, that the rate of mortality has rapidly increased of late years ; for in the Medical Statistics published by Dr. Bissett Hawkins, we find that in forty years, from 1780 to 1821, the mortality in England and Wales had decreased from 1 in 40 to 1 in 58 ; in 1839, or eighteen years from this time it had increased to 1 in 42.

It would be interesting to trace the rise or fall of particular fatal diseases, especially as regards their modification by the progress of civilization ; for instance, Heberden informs us that the mortality from apoplexy, diseases of the brain, &c., gradually increased during the hundred years composing the eighteenth century from 8 to 16 in every thousand deaths ; how much greater the proportion now is, may be easily ascertained by

referring to the bills of mortality, where it appears that the deaths classed under the head of “ Diseases of the brain, nerves, and senses,” average nearly 190 in every thousand. We also find that diseases of the nervous system are 25 per cent. more fatal to males than females, a fact easily accounted for by the difference of habits and employments of the two sexes. But, Sir, the time allowed for this oration will not admit of the subject being considered so fully in detail, I therefore propose confining myself to the enquiry, as to the degree of influence exerted over the health of the community *by the present habits of society.*

The condition, habits, and customs of society, and the influence which they exert over the health of the community at large, are matters of deep interest to the medical practitioner. How often is he called upon to “ minister to the mind diseased ;” how often is he required to tend the victim of misfortune and to smooth the pillows of adversity ;— how often does he witness and relieve the closing hours of that existence which, had society been differently constituted, might have been prolonged to good old age.

From the moment of our birth to that period when the great, the indomitable enemy of the human race claims his own, man sustains an artificial existence, characterized on the one hand, by labour, poverty, anxiety, and over-wrought mental

faculties; on the other, by luxury in all its seductive forms, trifling pleasures and excess. That these several states immediately influence health, and tend to the generation of disease, no less destructive, because it is sometimes slow in its progress, there can be no doubt. The over-strained mind must and does yield, whilst anxiety and poverty, no less surely and insiduously undermine the constitution, than do the luxuries, excitement, and injudicious customs at present indulged in by what is termed fashionable society. Who is there among my professional brethren here present, but must confess that were individuals to attend more to the dictates of nature, and less to the pleasures and fashions of life, his sphere of action would be much diminished.

One class of individuals lives on the wants and pleasures of another; the appetite of the rich is gratified and pampered by the skill and exertion of his more ingenious though less affluent fellow creature, whilst we are all engaged in unceasing endeavours to attain riches, rank, or fame.

In all classes of society—from the highest to the lowest, is this everlasting struggle going on; the Senator wears out his days in vain attempts to supplant his more favored rival in the paths of fame, and to hurl him from the throne of honor and ambition. The man of pleasure rushing into the vortex of profligacy and dissipation, in unceas-

ing endeavours to vary his amusements ardently pursues his idol at the expense of his life. The merchant toiling after wealth, exhausts his energies ere he attains the object of his desires. In a commercial country like this, where numbers count millions ; where the sinews of trade are strained to the utmost ; where commerce is exposed to constant fluctuation ; where competition is so great that little or no profit is derived, the trader is deprived of his fair remuneration, and in order to support those depending on him attempts to supply the deficiency by the magnitude of his dealings. Hence he is frequently obliged to exceed his own resources—he is induced to raise a false, a fictitious capital, and to keep up that capital, his mind is on the continual stretch—his days are spent in toil—his nights in restless anxiety, until at length his powers of endurance fail beneath the weight of the harrassing burden, his health becomes disordered, and he sinks into the hypochondriac, a melancholy wreck of what he was.

In the present day careful plodding trade has given place to the more exciting but more ruinous system of speculation ; the spirit of over-trading and desperate speculation is daily gaining ground, and an inordinate thirst for profit, seems to render many reckless of consequences. Men trust their all, and more than their all, on the hazard of a

die. A railroad is to be constructed, a mine to be explored ; or a King to be dethroned, and thousands upon thousands are cast into the pool. Untoward events occur which mar the prospects of these once thriving individuals, and plunge them into ruin. Hope delayed—alternating hope and fear, produce a condition of continued excitement. To excitement succeeds grief, to grief melancholy, every vital organ is disordered, and many die victims of speculation, or live disabled, miserable warnings to others.

Nor does the mischief end here, for if we turn to the lower ranks of society. The artizan overworked and inadequately paid, is too frequently thrown into utter pauperism, by the failure of his employer, for whom he has sacrificed his health and best energies.

In order to carry out this mighty, this destructive system, children of the most tender years (I believe as young as three years of age) are congregated in the close badly ventilated rooms of the manufactories, deprived of air and exercise for hours and days together. Exposed to the accumulation of vitiated atmosphere, at a period when they require pure air and exercise for the due developement of their frames—their growth is stunted—their bodies deformed—their vital energies and mental faculties depressed,—they become predisposed to struma and the formation of tuber-

culous deposits. This is no ideal assertion—it was proved by evidence delivered before the Committee of the House of Commons appointed to enquire into the facts, by no less an authority than the late lamented Sir A. Cooper, and has been brought immediately under my own observation within the last two or three months by some cases which occurred at Nottingham. The Poor Law Guardians of that town allowing party feeling to supersede the dictates of humanity and alike disregarding the representations of their own medical officers, and the remonstrances of their superiors, persisted in making thirty-eight children sleep four and five in a bed, in a room so confined as only to allow seventy-five cubic feet to each individual. The consequences were most serious, scarcely one of the children was in good health, and several deaths occurred. It may be interesting as bearing on this subject to mention the particulars of one case. The child as appeared from the evidence delivered at the inquest entered the Union House in good health on the 20th November, 1841. On the 4th of February, 1842, it was dead. Mr. Attenburrow, one of the first Surgeons of the town gave the following evidence—

“ I think the space highly improper for thirty-eight children. I have been in the room about half-past nine this morning where the child died. The effluvia at that time, although the children

had been out of it two hours, was so strong that in speaking to the Master I was obliged to put my head out of the window. I have examined the body and found it very much emaciated, there was great disease of the left lobe of the lung which was nearly incapable of receiving air ; Pneumonia—a slight hepatisation of the lower part of the right lobe—great accumulation of mucus on the upper part of the trachea and likewise down the air tubes, great Venous Congestion of the whole of the upper part of the body—General Congestion of the brain—the left lung firmly adherent to the Chest. Stomach with Granulation, Congestion and two slight ulcerations.

“From the diseased state of the lungs and impure air Asphyxia was produced. From the impossibility of carrying on the proper circulation, the whole of the Venous system was thoroughly loaded with blood. I should say that the immediate—the exciting cause of the death was the impure state of the air in that room.”

I quite agree with Mr. Attenburrow for nothing could be worse than the condition of the room in question.

Our limits will not allow me to dilate more fully upon this subject. The asthma, rheumatism, and head diseases of the miner, who drags on his miserable life in noxious vapours, and situations where the rays of heaven can never enter ; and

the diseases of artizans generally, are too well known to require comment.

The man of literature or science who contributes so much to the amusement of his own, and future generations, drags on his unrequited existence in one never-ending round of confinement, labour, and research. How many, many are there who depend on their own exertions even for their daily bread,—who to the utmost tax their intellects, whilst the cankering worm of care and distress is sapping the very foundation of the fabric—until at length they are fain like Swift to kneel down and supplicate the Almighty, that they may not, like that tree, be withered at the top, whilst the trunk exists.

And, Sir, may we not here pause to view the medical profession itself ; may we not here bestow a thought on those individuals whose skill, humanity, and powers of endurance are taxed beyond those of any other class of the community, and who are at all times ready to afford their assistance, in the hour of need without the hope of other fee or reward than the conviction of having performed a good and a kind action ; many are there amongst us who in their own persons combine the anxious student and the good Samaritan. Many are there who fall victims to the unflinching performance of their duties—perishing in our Colonies, whilst endeavouring to save and relieve their fellow

creatures, unmindful of the danger, and casting aside all thought of self. The snows and forests of America—the burning shores of Africa—pestilential Sierra Leone, and the no less fatal and deadly Niger, have all claimed and received their prey.

Exposed to every caprice of the public, frequently having to stem the waters of adversity ; the medical man's mind is worked to the utmost, until at length the thread of his existence snaps, he passes into a state of nervous excitability—he sinks and dies. Need I call to your recollection the fate of our late valued and respected Registrar and Sub-Librarian, whose life was sacrificed to the energies of his mind ? Need I enlarge upon this subject ?—I feel that I need not. The Medical Statistics shew that the average duration of medical men's lives is much lower than that of other classes. We cannot feel surprised at this—it may be accounted for by their unshaken courage under circumstances the most dangerous and appalling. Whilst the warrior who dauntlessly braves the danger of the fight, shrinks with dismay from the invisible assaults of disease and infection, the medical man throws himself into the breach and fearlessly endeavours to stem the torrent.

At the time of the plague, when court and camp fled the city ; when the mortality amounted to thousands daily, did the medical man leave his

post ? On the contrary, a number were selected by their own body to tend the sick and afflicted, and nobly did they perform their duty. When the Cholera of more recent date carried terror and death into the very bosom of families. When universal alarm spread over the land, and devastation stretched her hands in every direction, the medical man, as upon all occasions relying on the goodness of his cause, firmly pursued the even tenour of his way ; too frequently sinking in his efforts to save others.

I have now Sir, as far as time permits, attempted to trace the influence of profession and trade on the health of the community, I am perfectly aware that constituted as society is, we can scarcely hope for much amelioration. In most instances stern necessity bears the sway ; the monarchy of wealth and fashion issues the command, and thousands have but to obey that edict, detrimental as it may be to their health and happiness ; but, Sir, I would more especially direct the attention of this society to the influence exerted over the health of individuals, by habits and customs which they might control, being merely the fashion of the day, but not the less pernicious, because they are frequently adopted by the multitude.

When the Temperance Societies were first formed, their members suddenly deprived of their usual stimuli, became nervous and melancholy.

The mechanic earning his daily bread by the sweat of his brow, listless and irritable, prevented by his compact from availing himself of the accustomed excitement of liquor, and still further depressed by the decoction of pernicious herbs substituted by the laws of his society, turned his longing eyes in another direction, and sought relief in the more deleterious excitement of opium. The extent to which this drug is consumed in some districts of the country is far beyond what we could imagine. Whilst the purposes to which it is in some, I may say many instances, applied, are calculated to fill the mind with horror and dismay. It is customary among the poor to drug their children with this poison, infants at the breast, and children of more advanced age, are alike subjected to its influence ; I knew a washerwoman in a small village in Buckinghamshire, who used to proportion the dose to the number of hours she wished the child to sleep, whilst she was employed at work ; she would then take it up, suckle it, and again drug it ; as might be presumed the child died. And in the course of an investigation in which I was lately engaged, more than one child was presented to me as having been drugged by opium, the sickly countenance, stunted growth, and attenuated frame, fully bore evidence of the fact.

Among other cases related to me by the medical gentleman in attendance, was one which evinced

some ingenuity on the part of the perpetrator, if she intended to destroy the child, which was strongly suspected. A female who suckled her illegitimate infant, took a large dose of opium on going to bed, and afterwards placed the child at the breast. The mother slept soundly, and in the morning the infant was found dead by her side. From inquiries I have instituted, I learn that opium is consumed in large quantities by the poorer class in districts where we could scarcely have supposed its existence known, and when we find that in one year the quantity of opium entered for home consumption, rose from 19,276 to 33,482 lbs., some estimation may be formed of the influence exerted over health by this cause alone. And this will in some measure account for the failure of the Temperance Societies in causing that diminution in mortality which was anticipated by their supporters. May we not fairly enquire, whether the projectors have not fallen into the opposite extreme in their attempts to abolish beer and spirit drinking? Might they not more wisely have remembered that it was the abuse not the use of these liquors which they sought to remedy? At present it is only a substitution of intoxication by opium for that produced by beer, spirits, &c.

Again, Sir; among the influences of fashion upon health, I would particularize the method of rearing and educating children. In this would-be

age of intellect, when the schoolmaster stalks forth in all the dignity of the pedagogue, looking with contempt on the wholesome dictates of common sense ; we have infant Saphos, infant Lyras, the wonderful calculating boy ! &c. &c.—the infant at the breast is expected to imbibe general acquirements with his mothers milk, and a knowledge of the classics with his pap ; the child of two years old must be a child no longer,—he must not indulge in innocent prattle, or the joyous laugh, the one is foolish, the other ungenteel. He must be the child of learning and science,—a problem of Euclid,—a geometrical calculation, are much more suited to his advanced years ! Exercise and amusement are alike denied him, the innocent toy is beneath a child of his intellect. Poring over his daily task, the hectic cheek, glassy eye, and parched lip, too surely denote the unerring fate of this victim of fashion, sacrificed to the triumph of vanity over the natural feelings and affections of the parent.

Who is there present that has not experienced the delight of an introduction to a clever, a precocious show-child ?—and who, having watched the career of that child, has ever found him as a man fulfil the expectations raised in his youth ? This may in some degree be accounted for by the innate conceit of the individual, who daily receiving applause for the exhibition of his precocious

talents, at length imagines, that being so extraordinarily clever, application and study are alike beneath his notice. Hence the genius of the nursery becomes the college dunce. I am aware that there may be some few bright examples of the contrary, but not enough to render them more than exceptions to the general rule ; and, Sir, what a comparatively small number are there who ever attain to manhood. The precocity of childhood is frequently only the result of over-excitement of the cerebral system. The doting parent ignorant of the fact, or not stopping to enquire—pleased with the talent his child displays, leads him on from excitement to excitement, until at length the overwrought intellect yields, and the child dies of inflammation or water on the brain, or escaping death recovers to be an idiot for the remainder of his days.

A no less pernicious fate awaits the child of the more tender sex ; who from her cradle is tortured by the process of transformation into an elegant “Miss.” Who ever heard of a young lady romping ? who ever heard of a young lady running about as nature intended ? or indulging in a hearty laugh ? “it is too vulgar ;” these are the constant chidings of nurses and governesses, until at length with her spirits subdued, her muscles flabby, and digestive organs disordered, the little “Miss” promises to become, what her fond instructors appear most to

desire, a being of artificial health and manners. Then she is weak, her back requires support, in other words, her figure must be attended to ; she is accordingly encased in artificial bones and bandages, yclept stays. Why should this be ? do girls require support more than boys ? Why not allow one sex the free use of their limbs and muscles as well as the other ? If little girls were permitted to play about and throw their muscles into action, with the same freedom as the opposite sex, without going to the Spartan extreme of Lycurgus, we should have a much more healthy race of women, we should hear no more of weak backs, and the use of stays might be deferred until the stature were fully developed.

There is no greater error than the prevailing opinion that the female form is improved by the early employment of these worse than useless articles of attire, or one which it is more difficult for a medical man to combat and overcome ; but, Sir, when we consider the very large proportion of females who annually die of consumption in this country, ascertained to be above 31,000 ; when we learn by the returns of 1838, that this disease was 8 per cent more fatal to females than males, notwithstanding the greater exposure of the latter to the alternations of climate, &c. And that of the whole average of deaths, above 19 per cent were females from consumption. With these

facts, I say, before us, is it not our bounden duty to use our utmost endeavours in putting an end to this baneful custom. Are the blessings of health so valueless that they are thus trilled away? Is the duration of life so long as to require artificial curtailment? Are the admiration of the thoughtless throng or licentious admirer of such importance? Are the dictates of fashion so imperious that the very mainsprings of life are for their sake to be laid prostrate? Ought the vital functions to be thus interfered with at a period, when nature is striving her utmost to bring the body to perfection; in a word, Sir, ought a practice to be persevered in, which, by preventing the expansion of the thorax, interrupts the due oxygenation of the blood, diminishes nutrition, facilitates the deposition of tubercular matter, and sows the seeds of decline and premature decay. The custom is no less contrary to the laws of nature than to the dictates of common sense; propose placing boys in stays, and derision would assail you from all quarters: are boys differently formed? have they more muscles of the back? I confess that, having frequently examined the bodies of both sexes, I have never been able to discover any difference as to original formation of these parts; but I have frequently in the female found muscles undeveloped, thorax contracted, the lungs compressed, the position of the heart altered, and the liver indented by the ribs from tight lacing.

Time progresses—this child of luxury must be instructed, and accomplished. What are beauties of figure, graces of intellect, or the blessings of health, in comparison with accomplishments ? Accordingly she runs the gauntlet of the several artificial masters, passing her days in straining at the Piano, or compressing her Sternum in the attitude required for drawing and writing, until her frame (for the most part cartilage, and therefore easily altered in shape and position) yields—she is distorted—predisposed to consumption—an accomplished martyr to this system of education, and a burthen to herself and others ; and this evil is greatly augmented by the endeavours of her friends to remedy or counteract the mischief by the injudicious use of backboards, reclining plains, &c., specially invented for torturing children.

Emancipated from the school room, should she survive the ordeal, the young lady comes out and plunges immediately into pleasure and dissipation ; her nights are spent in the heated ball room, whither she proceeds at the hour formerly devoted to rest, dressed in the height of fashion, which literally means half (and that the most susceptible part of the body) uncovered, she braves the extreme of heat and cold, and flushed and excited, returns when the night is far spent ; frequently after day break. Unaccustomed to this mode of life, her health droops, her days are passed in idle

listlessness, without employment of any kind, either for mind or body, excepting that, to which idleness is almost preferable ; stooping over embroidery frames ; only roused by some sudden excitement or new-born pleasure ;—she fancies that to be delicate is to be interesting, and to attain this desirable end, practices all manner of absurdities, at times altogether declining to eat, at others fancying only that which is injurious ; her appetite must be pampered. She becomes peevish and complaining, and the affection which commenced in indolence, terminates in the several modifications of hysteria. In short, the “ nothing to do,” is perhaps the most difficult and perplexing disease a medical man has to treat.

Another source of disease is the want of caution against the vicissitudes of the weather. It is difficult I will admit entirely to guard against the fluctuations of the thermometer which in this climate is subject to such extreme variations even in the twenty-four hours ; but much more attention might be paid to this subject. The clothing adopted by the females of this country is totally inadequate to the purpose. Their shoes are usually so thin, that they cannot go out when the weather is at all moist, without having their feet chilled, and yet they would, in many instances, rather incur this risk, than have their feet appear clumsy or disfigured by stout shoes ; it would almost seem

where personal appearance is concerned, common sense and prudence entirely forsake them ; as we by no means unfrequently observe in our streets the somewhat strange anomaly of females walking about with their mouths and noses enveloped in respirators, and their feet clad in flimsy shoes with soles no thicker than brown paper, and thin silk stockings. We are constantly hearing of the delicacy and tender health of the sex, and so we shall continue to do as long as this practice lasts. It is a well known fact, proved by statistics, that as the thermometer sinks, deaths multiply. The seasons from summer to autumn, and autumn to winter, are marked by progressive mortality. In three winters the number of deaths amounted to 39,764 ; in three autumns to 36,684 ; in three springs to 35,128 ; and in three summers to 33,677. The mean temperature of these seasons was respectively, 39° — 44° — 53° —and 61° , and to a certain point this increase occurs nearly equally at all ages ; but beyond that, the greatest increase takes place among individuals of sixty years and upwards, as we shall find hereafter. When the mercury sinks to a given point the diminution of a single degree increases the number of deaths in the metropolis by nearly 200 weekly.

In the four weeks between the 29th November and 26th December, 1840, the mean temperature was 35° , and the weekly deaths averaged 1086 ;

but in the next four weeks ending 23rd January, 1841, when the temperature sank to 34° , the weekly mortality rose to 1239. Of this increase 100 occurred in individuals of sixty and upwards.

I fear, Sir, that I have already exhausted your patience by dwelling upon subjects apparently of trifling import; but my reason for so doing is not only to prove the influence which the habits and customs of society have over health; but more particularly to impress the great and paramount importance of at all times ascertaining the previous habits and history of our patients. Many men, young practitioners especially, abstain from so doing from motives of delicacy; but you will I am convinced agree with me that such delicacy is misplaced on these occasions where the life of a fellow creature is at stake. We are daily meeting with instances corroborative of this statement. How often do we hear of the omission of this practice leading to a line of treatment at once injurious and fatal to the patient, when had his previous history and habits been enquired into, a successful issue might have resulted, and a valuable life been preserved.

Another important point arises, I allude to the propriety of paying more attention to the state of the atmosphere, particularly as to temperature in the treatment of disease. We have seen that cold beyond a certain point increases mortality, and

also that a diminution of heat is accompanied by corresponding fatality of disease. Attention to these circumstances would I doubt not be beneficial ; certain dogmas are laid down—certain remedies prescribed for certain diseases ; but entirely without reference to their occurring in summer or winter. It is true that you, Sir, and most of the gentlemen whom I now have the honor of addressing, are guided by experience, and not by this or that rule ; but this is not the case with the younger branches of the profession, who emerge from their schools with nothing but theory for their guide, and I doubt whether these points are sufficiently impressed upon their attention.

Before I conclude, I would in connexion with the present subject beg to offer a remark on a point, which, although it may not be felt immediately, will I fear in course of time render the metropolis more unhealthy than it otherwise would be. Luxury extends not only to dress and appetite, but it must be applied even to our streets. The original pavement has suddenly become uneasy, and too noisy to be endured ; and now, in the nineteenth century, granite is to give place to wood. At present there is no city so healthy as this—there is no city where so much money is annually expended in perfecting the drains and sewers ; but of what avail will these be, if the streets are to become masses of decom-

posing vegetable matter. In the few specimens at present laid down we find that from the quantity of moisture imbibed, there is a continual emanation of damp whenever the sun shines with any degree of power. This may not be much felt in the wide streets where it is at present in use ; but adopt it generally, employ it in the narrow confined streets of those parts of the town where not above eighteen square yards are allowed to each individual, and I doubt not that should we be visited with any severe infectious epidemic, it will be much more fatal and more difficult to eradicate than at the present time.

There has also, Sir, been a considerable feeling, and to a certain extent a just one, excited on the subject of burying our dead in the crowded churchyards of London ; this has been carefully fostered by individuals anxious to embark in any new speculation, and accordingly Cemeteries have been formed in various parts of the suburbs. But I would fain enquire whether the number and situation of these wholesale charnal houses will not eventually have a worse effect than the present practice, bad though it be ?

London is almost, if not quite, encircled by Cemeteries, mostly placed on high ground. New Parks and public walks have been, or are about to be formed, that the artizan may recruit his exhausted energies, and refresh his weary limbs, in

a pure atmosphere. The respiration of pure air is indispensable to health, and what may I ask will be the use of forming these new Parks, &c., if the air is to be thus vitiated ? formerly each wind that blew at least supplied fresh air to the metropolis ; now, on the contrary, it comes charged with the effluvia arising from these places.

When to this is added a large mass of decomposing wood in our streets, the result cannot fail to be prejudicial to health.

I will only detain you, Sir, a few moments longer from the pleasing duty of presenting our friend, Dr. Bennet, with the Fothergilian Medal, whilst in conclusion, I express my regret to you and the gentlemen present that this oration has not been more worthy your attention ; I have already observed how disinclined I was to accede to the wishes of your Council ; but one inducement, and one inducement alone, led me to accept my present office, it was, Sir, that I considered it the bounden duty of the members of this society to endeavour by every means in their power to testify the high sense they entertain of the debt of gratitude due to you for the unfailing and untiring zeal you at all times manifest for its welfare, and the great kindness and urbanity you invariably display towards them. Stepping forward as you did at a time when the peculiarity of the circumstances rendered your assistance of tenfold impor-

tance. Sacrificing, as you must do, the comforts of domestic society, and ready as you are, at all times, and upon all occasions, to benefit the younger members of the profession with the results of your extensive and invaluable experience ; I feel that I should allow a golden opportunity to escape me, were I not to grasp it, for the purpose of expressing in the name of every member of the Medical Society of London, how deeply we prize the benefits you have conferred upon us, and how sincerely we trust that you may be spared for many, many years, to enlighten us with your councils and guide us by your example.